

# Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

## Meeting Notes for October 4, 2000

### Agenda Items

- MLK Corridor Design

### Commissioners Present

Rick Sundberg, Chair  
Matthew Kitchen  
Jay Lazerwitz  
Jack Mackie  
Mimi Sheridan  
Paul Tomita

### Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit  
Marty Curry, Planning Commission  
Barbara Goldstein, Arts Commission  
Sue Kelly, CityDesign  
Cheryl Sizov, CityDesign  
John Walser, Sound Transit

The meeting opened with introductions of the Commissioners, staff and guests. September 6<sup>th</sup> meeting notes were approved and the schedule of upcoming LRRP meetings was discussed. Rick Sundberg then invited Steve Arai to provide a recap of the key ideas presented at the MLK Corridor public meeting on September 19<sup>th</sup> for Panel discussion.

### Discussion of MLK Corridor Schematic Design

*Steve Arai, Arai Jackson*

Steve Arai recapped key points of the MLK Corridor design presentation made to the community, including the concept of 4 "zones" or sections of MLK each with a different character—industrial, commercial, residential, and transitional. He reported that Owen Lang is being retained in a leadership role for final design, and that now station design work will resume in order to integrate station design with MLK Corridor design for a presentation to the community in November. The update from Steve then concluded since nearly all Panel members had been present to hear the full presentations made at the community meeting two weeks earlier.

### Discussion

- What is the sidewalk width? (At this time, we are planning on a standard City width, but are also working with the City on a list of areas where the sidewalk would be 17' wide. This effort has not concluded yet.)
- What happened to the concept of artwork in the triangular-shaped parcels of land along MLK? And are there both parking and travel lanes in the commercial areas? (We are leaning more and more to focusing artwork in the plaza and station areas rather than the triangles, some of which are located in areas that do not receive much pedestrian activity. Although it was a good idea, on further examination the sites are less than optimally located for artwork. There is not a special parking lane along the corridor, except for the Rainier Vista area where potentially more land is available along MLK.)
- Are the TPSS and S/C structures proposed to be sited at stations or along the corridor? (Mostly at plazas for Edmunds, Othello, and Henderson.)
- I'm concerned about jaywalking and how it might be discouraged through design. There appears to be an "island" that creates a refuge for pedestrians—will this only encourage more jaywalking? (We are thinking of various surface treatments that might discourage people from crossing the street

inappropriately; e.g. cobbles or riverstone, but those could also create a tripping hazard if someone does choose to go there. Planting areas are another possibility. We are not considering fences.)

- Heavily planting an area is a good way to keep people out of the trackway. Also, curb to curb paving is not an appealing residential frontage. I'm concerned about children crossing the street unsafely. (We are also siting crosswalks to discourage jaywalking.)
- I commend you for adding nine additional crossings—try to find room for even more. (Seatran staff noted that they want to minimize features that look like curb ramps to discourage vehicular crossings of the trackway, and they are encouraging Sound Transit to maximize opportunities for landscaping.)
- Although you are not developing specific design themes per se for each segment, the idea occurs to me that you could consider having four different approaches to lighting, tree species, etc. by segment. Opinions on that? (The overall concept is that of a symbolic entrance and gateway to Seattle and the community. We do want to customize the segments to each community, but still need to have system-wide consistency via some elements. We are still working out the details of this.)
- I like the concept of four different zones because the sequence through them makes the corridor interesting. I support changes in materials to "read" and respond to each zone, but I'm also concerned about transitions. What is the scope of the east/west links? How many will carry through? (Only Edmunds and Henderson Streets are in the budget, but other streets such as Alaska Street are possibilities if we can find other fund sources.)
- What is the thinking of the transition structures; what is the urban design experience projected to be like there? (More work needs to be done. As the guideway turns and elevates, the aerial structure could be a design feature in character with the station, more like a bridge, and less like a retained fill structure. We're looking at treating it contextually, taking cues from Olmsted work. At Boeing Access Road the context is industrial which could suggest a design that is more related to the system than its context.)
- Will utilities including electrical lines be underground? (We are working with City Light to determine whether lines will be put underground. It is very costly. We are sorting out what would be part of the Sound Transit project, and what would be the City's responsibility. We'll be presenting to the Mayor and Council soon as this issue is becoming central to the design and to the community's expectations.)
- Are you willing to consider doing something different with signage—both street and Link—to give the corridor identity? (Maybe. We'll work with the City. Whether we underground lines or not, we want to minimize poles since there will be so prominent as one looks down MLK in either direction. We're examining the possibility of making the cross member of the OCS system being more "artful" but this has cost implications. We've worked hard on the OCS poles and are still interested in this idea.)
- I'm pleased to see the detail. I'm thinking about the experience of coming from outside the City of Seattle to finally understand where you are. The finer, human elements are needed to activate the areas. (Seatran staff recapped the comments made by staff at approximately 30% completion, noting the following issues were looked at—curb alignment, emergency vehicle access, mountable curbs, rockeries/retaining walls, turning radii.)
- This is the first I've heard about moving art from the triangle parcels to stations. Why? Is this a budget issue? (We see the stations as areas of activity, and it is hard to predict where other activity would take place. Over time other projects could evolve at other locations, but for now the triangle parcels are more an anomaly of geography than a rational site for art that has a neighborhood focus.)
- I'm bothered by that because people will be moving through the whole corridor and not just stations. Moving through the landscape itself is an experience. (We'll come back in December to review some art pieces with significant scale and presence.)

- The triangle parcels could also be a parks/landscape theme.

### **Recommendation**

*The Panel commends Sound Transit and consultants for taking the time and committing the resources to re-examine the design of the MLK Corridor, noting that the effort has been worthwhile both in the substance of the design work presented and in the increased community support generated. The Panel therefore recommends approval of the conceptual approach to the design as distinct segments each with their own character emerging from the context, as opposed to applying a design idea uniformly along the length of MLK. The Panel acknowledges that this approach is perhaps more challenging to execute, but will result in a stronger design that is well-suited to the Corridor. The Panel requests further attention to the following items as design work progresses:*

***Human Experience of the Whole Corridor:** As the longest segment of at-grade light rail in the City of Seattle, the MLK Corridor will be a signature piece of the Link system. Attention should be paid at every level to how people experience the Corridor—as pedestrians, as light rail passengers, as drivers, as cyclists, and as residents, business owners, and shoppers—focusing on creating a positive experience for the user.*

***TPSS and Other Systems Structures:** The Panel would like to see these structures as soon as possible, given their size and potential impact on the design and experience of the Corridor. Issues of location, materials, design, function, and adjacent uses should be addressed in any future presentation.*

***Design Guidelines:** The Panel encourages the City and/or Sound Transit to develop design guidelines to guide the development of private property adjacent to the Corridor, emphasizing opportunities to increase the width of sidewalks and general right-of-way for pedestrian improvements or landscaping.*

***Pedestrian Crossings:** Although the rebuilt MLK, Jr. Way will include more signalized crossings than currently exist, the Panel is still concerned about the potential for jaywalking and the safety hazards it implies. Sound Transit is therefore encouraged to work closely with Seatran to design attractive and safe pedestrian crossings where we want people to cross the street, and to use landscaping or other design elements to discourage crossings in places where we don't want people to cross the street.*

***Landscaping:** As drawing out the distinct segments of the corridor is the basis of the design concept, the Panel encourages the proponents to fully explore and exhibit the corridor distinctions through an expressive use of landscape in species, scale, and color. In keeping with concerns regarding pedestrian jaywalking, the Panel urges Sound Transit to fundamentally rethink the notion of a trackway that is "hardscaped" in this corridor from curb-line to curb-line. This is simply too much hardscape, particularly for the residential neighborhood.*

***Public Art:** The Panel requests that public art be made a part of all future presentations in order to understand the relationship between art and architecture and engineering, to use the design process to effectively coordinate and maximize opportunities for art, and to stay abreast of design changes and their impacts on art. The Panel also wishes to hear more about the rationale for not using the triangular parcels of land for art installations (as previously proposed).*

## **Discussion of McClellan Urban Design Study**

Lee Copeland, Weinstein Copeland

Jeff Olson, Weinstein Copeland

Jeff Olson announced that since the community meeting, a grant has been awarded for the City to study the feasibility of the traffic rotary that is the centerpiece of the urban design study. However it is important to note that the design doesn't depend on the rotary. The design is a response to the desire to coordinate with the idea of a town center, creating a plaza at the south end of the site. This location is better with retail in it than with stairs and escalators, and is a more efficient circulation pattern for Sound Transit purposes. With that update, the Panel then moved quickly into discussion.

### Discussion

- What about the bus/rail connections? (We're assuming a mid-block surface crossing on Rainier. Sound Transit is considering not purchasing any property along Rainier Avenue. If the station is behind existing development, the pedestrian access will be at the middle to/from the bus facility and with another access from the rear... The design has also changed from end-loaded to center-loaded. Sound Transit's schedule for station design is to have a revised 30% design by the end of October for presentation to the public and LRRP in November. We are still wrestling with what is needed for staging and construction, and what we can/can't do with surrounding property. We're looking for a design that is flexible to accommodate a change in entry...)
- You are proposing housing on MLK? (The community supports housing there. The U.W. property stays as parking in Phase I, but housing or office use with parking later to help boost the town center activity. The U.W. property is key to making the town center happen.)
- Does the community understand the trade-offs? Some community members are challenging the rezone proposals for higher densities. (The Committee we've worked with has been constructive in this effort, and has around on two key points: 1. That commercial development can't be entirely supported by pedestrians, and 2. That people will need to live there to support the town center, not just work there. This is why we're pushing housing so hard.)
- What is the timeframe? Viability? What type of housing? (We're still working those issues out, but probably long-range; 10-20 years.)
- What about structured parking? (Two areas might be appropriate—U.W. property or area under the guideway with two levels because of the topography.)
- Does this plan include a new Department of Social and Health Services? (No, they will probably not return because the timeframe for development doesn't match their needs.)
- So the community's acceptance of housing here doesn't imply broader acceptance of broader rezone efforts.
- The entrance of the station should be a factor in the street crossing and bus layover. The rotary calls attention to the center, but are we moving away from it with a station entrance further north? Can there be an entry at the plaza north of the rotary also? (The community prefers not to have the station be the dominant feature of the town center in the long run. The center-loaded entrance draws people through commercial uses and may better serve the town center ultimately. All points will bring the pedestrian to the center entry. Other benefits are that wayfinding for mobility-impaired is easier with just one entrance than two. Lastly, the Stevens Street corridor provides a gap through which there is a good view of the station.)

### Recommendation

***The Seattle Light Rail Review Panel thanks consultants for their presentation on the recent urban design work for the McClellan area. The Panel recommends approval of the work to date, noting particular support for the rotary and for housing development, and requesting further development of the following elements:***

- *A more detailed analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of a center-loaded platform; specifically the connections to housing, retail, and bus transfer.*
- *A full analysis, as soon as possible, of the viability of the rotary intersection concept for MLK and Rainier.*
- *Feasibility of developing housing as part of Phase I development.*

*The Panel looks forward to a presentation soon on the McClellan station design and its fit with this urban design work.*

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 PM.